2: Hickinbotham G-4, 5 (ca. 1931-ca. 1957)
1958 MM1 Aden MM1

CHAPTER TWO

Early Days

"ARRIVED at Aden at 4 p.m. The place is not as I had expected and I found I had forgotten all about it. It looked just like a penal settlement and the nearer one got the more unprepossessing the place became"; such was the entry in my diary for October 4th, 1931.

It was the normal reaction of most people who see Aden from the deck of a ship at the tail end of the summer, and, like most people, I knew very little about the town, less about the Protectorate, and nothing at all about the history of the place.

The first authentic recorded mention of Aden is to be found in the Bible at the 23rd verse of the 27th Chapter of Ezekiel, where it is written: "Haran, and Canneh, and Eden, the merchants of Sheba, Asshur and Chilmad, were thy merchants." When I read this verse I was puzzled by the rendering of Aden as "Eden", and I consulted my Arabic version of the Scriptures and was reassured by finding that the word "Eden" was spelt in precisely the same way as it is written in Arabic today. If additional evidence of the identity of this "Eden" with Aden is required, it is to be found in the very next verse which runs as follows: "These were thy merchants in all sorts of things, in blue clothes . . ." The reference is to the indigo impregnated cloth which is still worn by very many of the inhabitants of the Protectorate and was a common sight in the Colony a few years ago.

The early history of Aden is difficult to piece together, consisting as it does of travellers' tales and records, some undoubtedly true, but others of dubious authenticity, but the one

2: Hickinbotham G-4, 5 (ca. 1931-ca. 1957)
1958 MMI Aden MMI

645
647
291
142

[facing p. 18]

Aden

We arrived unhurriedly on the small landing ground at Mukeiras; the Fairey a Fs never hurried, but they generally got to their destination, which was just as well because they were single-engined aircraft and the Protectorate has an unduly large proportion of sharp rocky hills to nice flat open spaces suitable for a forced landing.

[291] We were met on arrival by a seething mass of blue-kilted tribesmen led by the young Sultan, Saleh bin Hussein[1] bin Jabil, and the Regent, Sultan Mohd bin Jabil, and the Sultan's father, Hussein bin Jabil. It was my first meeting with the Sultan who was later to become my personal friend and one of the staunchest and most loyal of the Rulers of the Protectorate. At that time he was just a nice-looking lad and I was more interested in the Regent, a hook-nosed middle-aged man, crafty and, I was to learn later, unreliable, and also in the Sultan's father Hussein, a fine figure of a man with an open frank countenance and a charming smile, which his son has inherited. Hussein was killed some years later not far from Mukeiras in a tribal dust-up with the Ramain, a tribe which lies to the Yemen side of the *status quo* frontier. His death was a loss to his people, to his son and to us.

[184] [574] As we walked forward towards the village surrounded by and followed by a crowd of tribesmen, some cattle and goats were led out and slaughtered in front of us, a disgusting business, but required by tradition on such great occasions. Incidentally, they provided the basis of the meal we would eat later. Quite often in the future I tried to stop the barbarous custom, and sometimes I was successful, much to the disappointment of the poorer elements who invariably benefit by being given the remnants of the feast.

On arrival at the village we were led into a small house to await the final preparation of lunch; while we were waiting for the meal a diversion was caused by a stout gentleman with a fine black beard walking into the room. He gave a general greeting to the company there assembled and his arrival appeared to cause some surprise to many of those present, although I am certain that the Regent was well aware of his

[1] Sultan Saleh bin Hussein, C.M.G., C.B.E.

184
[157]

First Acquaintance with the Protectorate

The people are, as I was quick to realise after I had seen and spoken to the tribesman at the Khormaksar races, independent and virile, and later I was to find that they did not lack a sense of humour. In the Highlands they dress, even to this day, in blue cotton kilts which reach to the knee, leaving the upper part of the body bare, except for the vegetable oil and blue dye with which they rub their skin as a protection against the sun in summer and the cold in winter. The kilt is held in place by a leather cartridge belt which in turn supports a dagger, generally with a silver scabbard. A rifle and a pair of leather sandals complete the picture, except in the Colony where rifles and daggers, except for the privileged few, have to be surrendered to authority on entrance, and may not be carried on the person. In the Colony, too, and indeed in the more developed areas of the Protectorate, the blue kilt has given place to brightly coloured kilts made from silk and cotton cloth imported from Indonesia and India, and the blue dye and oil have been replaced by shirts and coats, and indeed, by collars and ties and trousers when the owners have come to this country either on business or for pleasure.

[291] •
[302]
[411]
177
178
291
439

2: Hickinbotham G-4, 5 (ca. 1931-ca. 1957)
1958 MM1 Aden MM1

142
291
302
411

A TRIBAL GUARDSMAN

[facing p. 114]

a rather more inferior donkey, and seemed to hold some sort of quasi-political appointment in the State; he spoke Urdu, which he had learnt during his police service in Aden. He and I conversed together in that language to the irritation of Europeans and Arabs alike who could not understand what we were saying. Perhaps it was as well. The Jemadar and I had quite an amusing time. The rest of the party followed on behind, with the doctor bringing up the rear after the baggage animals, ready to deal with any casualties.

We always started the daily march early in the morning after the lightest of meals and moved steadily forward until midday, when we would halt to rest and feed the animals and ourselves; just before sunset, we would select a camp site among the terraced fields at the side of the valley and a hot meal would be prepared by the cooks, while our servants set up our camp-beds in the open and we relaxed on rugs spread on the bare ground. Sleep came easily.

[361] On the last day as we approached our destination, we could see Al Qara gleaming white far above us on its hilltop and by mid-morning we were near the base of the hill. Just before noon [291] [302] we crossed a small rise and there on the flat ground immediately below the hill thousands of tribesmen were drawn up in lines awaiting our arrival. Blue kilts, indigo-dyed bodice, bobbed [411] hair, rough leather sandals and the inevitable armoury of rifle, cartridge belt and silver sheathed dagger; they were as splendid [643] as they were unexpected in that wild and seemingly sparsely populated country. Sultan Muhammed and I moved forward on foot to greet the Sultan who, dressed in a purple plush frock coat, a blue and yellow striped kilt and a head cloth of the same colours, was busily engaged acting as ringmaster in the midst of this amazing scene. Like his men he carried a rifle, and as we approached welcoming shots were fired by him and his immediate entourage and replied to by his son and my party. The Sultan and I exchanged the customary greeting and shook hands, and then I shook hands with the tribal leaders and walked down the ranks of tribesmen.

Up to this point everything had been remarkably well ordered and controlled, but when the Sultan who was by